

A HAIRY WATER TORTOISE FROM CHINA.

Through the kindness of Mr. White, son of the late Lord Mayor, I am enabled to give a representation of a most interesting little creature which he himself brought from China. It is a terrapin or water tortoise, which apparently has hairs growing out from its back. When it first arrived it seemed very unwell, and I do not wonder, for the poor little thing had not had anything to eat for some months. Knowing it was very intolerant of cold, I placed it in warm water, and kept it in a warm place, and the little thing shortly, to my delight, began to feed from my hand. It will snap at and devour little bits of meat, fish, shrimps, etc. As the little animal swims, the fiber of the vegetable growth hangs away from him so as to give him the appearance of an animated bunch of weeds. His face is very intelligent.

I do not know whether the growth upon this terrapin's back has been produced artificially or naturally. It is simply a water grass, something like the weedy material growing on decaying woodwork and lock gates of rivers. It is possible that the ingenious Chinese may have some way of doctoring up the living specimens of terrapins, of which I understand considerable numbers exist in the ditches and marshes of China. These Chinese, as we are all aware, are stated to have the art of making the large fresh water pearl-bearing muscles secrete pearls, and cover over metal images placed within the shells for that purpose. If they can do this with the pearl shell, I do not see that it is impossible for them to make this vegetable material grow upon the back of a tortoise.

The tortoise being a sacred emblem in China the Chinese make pets of the hairy tortoise, which they keep in basins of water during the summer months, and bury in sand during winter. A small lake in the province of Kiang-su is famous for these so-called hairy tortoises, and many persons earn a livelihood by the sale of these curious little pets, which are about two inches long.

I have been to the British Museum to see if I could find anything like this hairy terrapin, but could not do so. I shall take the liberty of forwarding this article to His Excellency the Chinese Ambassador, who, I have no doubt, with his usual kindness, will obtain some further information about this great curiosity.—*Frank Buckland, in Land and Water.*

THE PADDLE FISH OF THE MISSISSIPPI.

BY DANIEL C. BEARD.

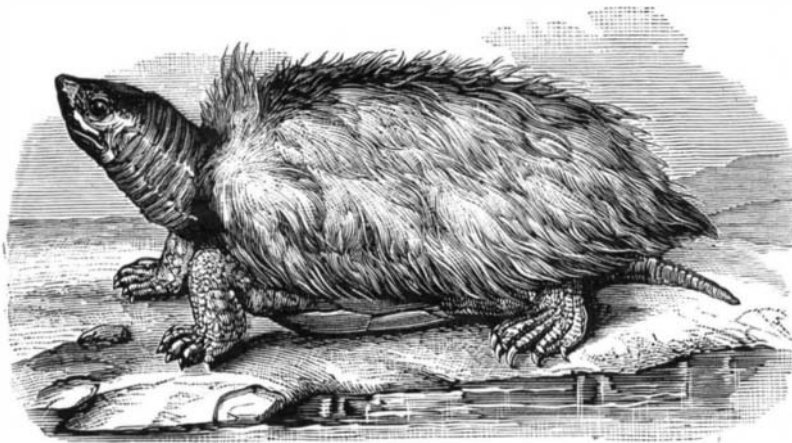
Love for natural history has often led me to consult books upon that subject in search of descriptions and illustrations of creatures captured in my wanderings. I have been struck, as no doubt have many others, by the absence of any illustration and the very meager descriptions given of many of our most curious native specimens. Especially is this noticeable among the fish and reptiles. Indeed I have often had considerable difficulty in finding the proper names for creatures quite common in some sections of our country. This fact, in addition to a natural love for and interest in this sub-

ject, has induced me to make careful drawings of many of our native fish.

In the turbid waters of the great Mississippi and its tributaries, swim curiosities and monsters entirely unknown in the Eastern States, and, to judge from the short and unsatisfactory descriptions given, but little known to our scientists.

Down in the southern Mississippi and its sluggish bayous lurks a strange and uncouth fish, known to the natives as the alligator gar. This ferocious creature often attains the length of five and six feet, his mouth is large, broad, and armed with sharp teeth, and his body is covered with an almost impervious armor.

Wallowing in the mud of the bottom, like some species of marine swine, are enormous cat fish, "mud cats," frequently weighing 100 lbs. Huge slimy animals, their large gaping



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mouths, small eyes, yellow and blotched sides, so fat and flabby, all go to make rather a disgusting creature, and yet with all their unattractive exteriors they are valued by many as a toothsome article of food, and by the negroes are considered a special delicacy. But by far the most comical and the oddest individual is the one of which I have given you a picture.

"Shovel nose," "paddle fish," and "spoon bill" are a few of his aliases when at home where he lives, but among the initiated he is known as the *Spatularia folium*. He is found, as far as I know, only in the Mississippi and its inflowing southern streams. I have never heard of any specimens being captured excepting in nets. The bony structure of the mouth would render it rather difficult to catch this fish with any ordinary hook. According to my personal observation the maximum length of the paddle fish is from three to four feet; no doubt some grow to a much greater size.

To my knowledge they are not eaten except by the darkies. The location of the fins, the shape and construction of the tail, and omitting the long exaggerated snout, the general appearance is that of the sturgeon. Inhabiting the streams with soft yielding bottoms nature has bestowed upon this

ganoid an instrument well adapted for digging in search of food, for such, I am informed, is its habit.

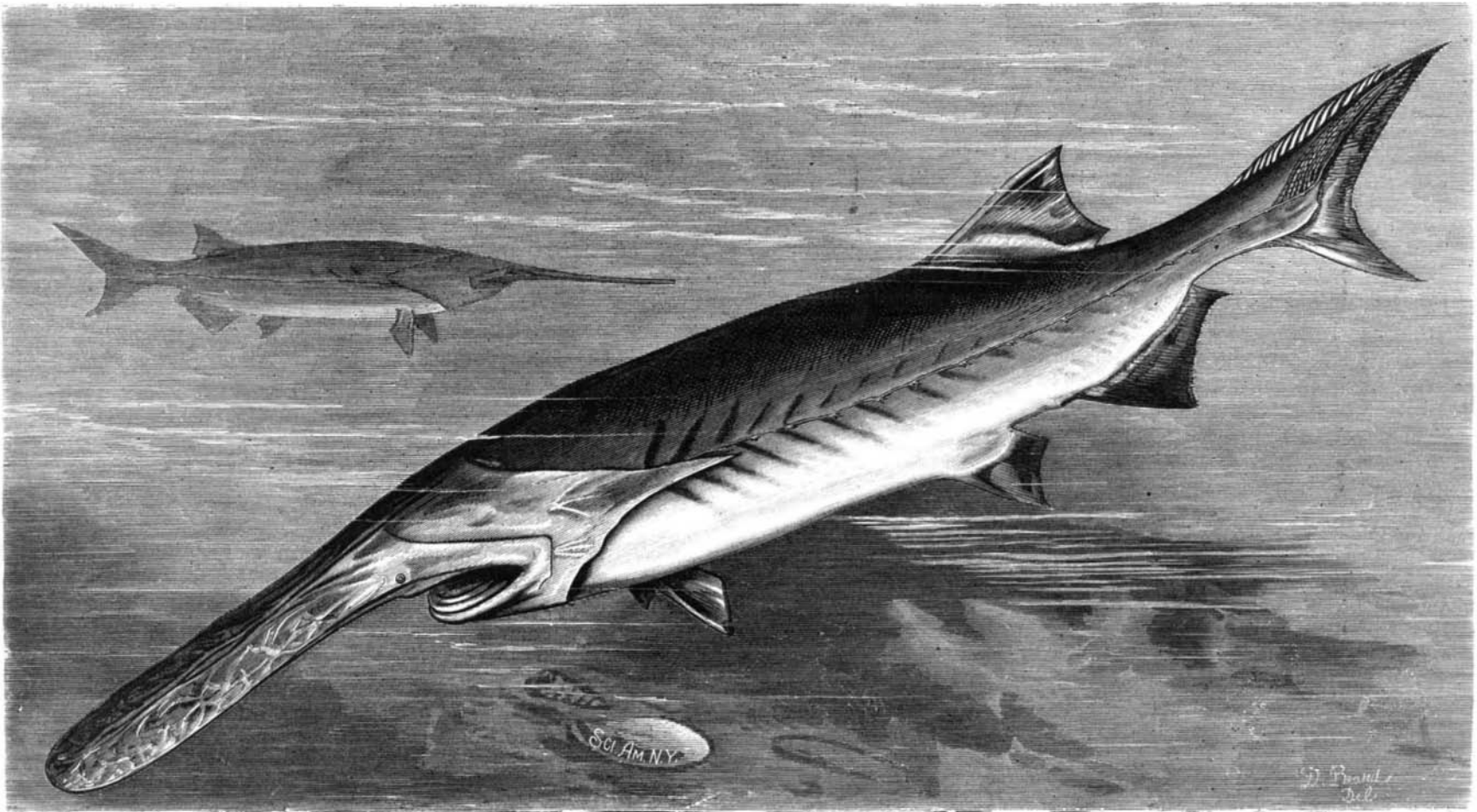
This illustration is from a specimen secured at St. Louis, Mo. It measures from tip of tail to tip of nose three feet and four and four fifths inches; length of nose, or paddles, from tip to point between the eyes, eleven and one quarter inches—a little over one third the length of the fish. Color, silvery white upon the belly, darkening gradually to the lateral line, above this to a bluish tint, deepening into a blackish blue on the back; no scales; skin is the same texture and appearance as the blue catfish. Eyes small, and on the under sides of the head, one quarter inch in front of the lower lip, one eighth inch in diameter; two pairs of nostrils, one quarter inch in front of the eyes, and one pair of apparent nostrils just over the back of the mouth. Lateral line has the appearance of a vein with small branches running

about one sixteenth of an inch and disappearing in the skin. The paddle is composed of a light porous bony substance, knit together by a network of bony stars of from six to eight rays each, that become elongated towards the center of the paddle, forming a ridge, which runs to a point where the gill covers join with the top of the head. Gill covers fleshy; operculum and suboperculum marked by fan-like rays. The length of gill covers, left side from extreme point to where it joined the top of the head, eight inches; while the same on the right side measured but four and a half inches. The lower jaw commences at a point immediately under the eyes; mouth broad, extending back three inches. No teeth perceptible to the naked eye, but could be felt upon the upper lip. I have been informed that when quite young they have sharp teeth upon the upper and lower jaws.

The illustration will show location of fins, which are composed of soft rays. This description will be sufficient, I hope, to give a general idea of this most curious fish.

The Osage Orange.

The Osage orange, otherwise known as *bois d'arc* (bow wood) or bodock (*Maclura aurantiaca*), is a beautiful and valuable tree on the banks of the Arkansas, where it is a native, and where it often attains a height of 60 feet, although in the Eastern States it is rarely planted except for hedges; its value for this purpose being due to its immunity from disease and the attacks of insects. This tree is hardy much further north than its native home, and endures the winter perfectly well even in the vicinity of New York city, and it is somewhat surprising that it is not oftener cultivated, inasmuch as it is one of our most valuable native woods. A writer in the *Cultivator and Country Gentleman* says of it, "that either for rapid growth, hardiness, durability of timber, habit and form, density of shade, and general beauty of shape and outline, when growing by itself, it is ten times more valuable, desirable, and beautiful than the catalpa of any variety of which we have lately heard so much." He remarks further that, "after twenty years' observation of it, were he about to plant a grove or lay out a timber belt for



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